

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
2493 Portola Road, Suite B
Ventura, California 93003
Phone: 805/644-1766
Fax: 805/644-3958
<http://ventura.fws.gov>

News Release



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Contact: Lois Grunwald, 805/644-1766

Public Scoping Meetings to be held on Habitat Conservation Plan

Workshops to be held in Morro Bay on February 23

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold two public meetings to ask for comments on the Service's intention to develop a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on a proposed California Department of Parks and Recreation's Habitat Conservation Plan for the San Luis Obispo Coast District Parks and Oceano Dunes State Recreation Area in San Luis Obispo County.

The meetings will be held Wednesday, February 23, 2005, at the Morro Bay Natural History Museum, 20 State Park Road in Morro Bay, from 1 to 3 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. The Service will accept written comments on issues and alternatives that the public considers important for analysis in the EIS.

The proposed Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) will include a Federal permit which will allow the incidental 'take' of species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) during lawful land use activities on public land. Under the ESA, 'take' is defined as: harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap or collect a listed animal species, or attempt to engage in such conduct.

Under the HCP, incidental 'take' would be authorized for the endangered California least tern (*Sterna antillarum browni*), Morro shoulderband snail (*Helminthoglypta walkeriana*), threatened western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*), and the California red-legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*). The HCP would cover six park units in the Estero Bay and Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes areas. These park units are: Estero Bluffs, Morro Strand State Beach, Morro Bay State Park, Montana De Oro State Park, Pismo Dunes Natural Preserve, and Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation also proposes to provide conservation benefits to eight federally-listed plant species and two unlisted plants by including the plants in the draft HCP.

The proposed HCP would describe ways that normal activities in the park unit and recreation area can minimize and mitigate take of species, provide predator control and monitoring and management of species, and enhance and restore habitat.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.